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Of the poet's earlier days, what has been said has been as often contradicted. According to the date on his monument, he was born in 1510, but the best authorities now agree that he was born in London nearly a half century later. In time he was sent to Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, where, competing for a fellowship with Andrews (afterwards Bishop of Winchester), he was defeated. He left the university by reason of poverty, and soon after fell in love, as poor and unfortunate geniuses are ever prone to do. The "Shepherd's Calendar" and poems to his "Rosaland" were then in order. Love became the herald to fame; men of letters and of influence began to recognize his talent, and soon Spenser was blessed with friends faithful to his interests and powerful in their own. A pretty story (not well authenticated), runs like this: "To Sir Philip Sidney, poet, warrior and statesman, Spenser carried a canto of the 'Faerie Queene.' Sidney was much surprised, and is said to have shown an unusual kind of transport at the discovery of so new and uncommon a genius. After he had read some stanzas, he turned to his steward and bade him give the person that brought the verses fifty pounds; and upon reading the next stanza, he ordered the sum to be doubled. The steward was no less surprised than his master, and thought it his duty to make some delay in executing so sudden and lavish a bounty; but upon reading one stanza more, Sidney raised his gratuity to two hundred pounds, and commanded the steward to give it immediately, lest, as he read further, he might be tempted to give away his whole estate."

Spenser, in time, was chosen poet laureate; but it was "an outward honor for an inward toil." Elizabeth's Lord High Treasurer neglected, if he did not ill-use the poet. Tradition tells us that once, when the queen would have given Spenser a present of a hundred pounds, Burleigh protested, saying: "What! all this for a single song?"

"Then give," said Her Majesty, "what is reason."

The Lord High Treasurer saw reason in *nothing*; and the expectant poet awaited a present that was not forthcoming. One day Spenser sent the queen the following lines:

"I was promised on a time  
To have reason for my rhyme;  
From that time unto this season,  
I received nor rhyme nor reason."

Elizabeth received the epigram, Burleigh a rebuke, and Spenser his money.

In 1579 the poet was sent abroad by the Earl of Leicester. He traveled over the continent at a time when the whole country was alive with arms; and yet the cultivation of arts was at its height. Spenser had hitherto studied men and motives; now the world without began to seem less like a dissolving picture. When Lord Grey became Deputy of Ireland, Spenser was appointed secretary. Through the influence of Sir Philip Sidney, he obtained a grant of three thousand acres on the beautiful river Mulla, in the county of Cork, with a home in Kilcolman castle, an ancient stronghold of the Earl of Desmond. This was the last of Sidney's many proofs of friendship: the illustrious author of the *Arcadia* died, a few months later, from wounds received in the battle of Zutphen. Poetry seldom goes hand in hand with politics; but Spenser's discourse on "the state of Ireland" evinced his practical knowledge and fitness for his position as secretary. Sir Walter Raleigh, then a captain under Lord Grey, became a firm friend of the poet. In the poem, "Colin Clout's Come Home Again," Raleigh is described under the name of the *Shepherd of the Ocean* and it was to the "Right Noble and Valorous Sir Walter Raleigh, Knight," that Spenser wrote the letter annexed to the "Faerie Queene," expounding his "whole intention in the course of the work."

Spenser's entrance into Ireland was the opening gate into a new realm. From the sound of titles and the glitter of diamonds, from the lords and ladies of Elizabeth's court, he went to the contrast of a people devoid of all luxury, but bold in the simple grandeur of a life true to nature—a people strong in love of country, and, though rude in thought and habit, cherishing stately superstitions and a spirit of proud melancholy romance. To the associations of such a nation, soil, and climate, may be traced many of the characteristics of Spenser's poems; for here, in the old castle, he wrote the greatest of his works.

The "Faerie Queene" was the legitimate offspring of the age in which it saw the light; the gorgeous

superstructure of fancy, legend and brilliant allegory had only the virtues and passions for corner-stones, yet, by the master-builder, the commonplace was transformed into the immortal. Men have not grown less imaginative in the last three centuries; they are as keen in detecting analogies of beauty, but allegories are things of the past. Faith is faith now—not "Fidelia arrayed in lily-white." It has been said that to read the "Faerie Queene" as one ought, is to read it as a child does a fairy tale, following the story only, and making no attempt to trace the allegory which is sometimes forced—always obscure. Be this as it may, none need read Spenser with disappointment. The thoughtful man will recognize truths that lose neither in strength nor sublimity because he finds them personified; the child may slip his hand into the quaint old poet's and step with him into a very wonderland. To the man, the Red Cross Knight is the embodiment of holiness; to the child, who remembers the two days fight with the Dragon, he is a second Jack the Giant Killer. For in all reading, the old Persian saying is verily true:

"Each is bounded by his nature  
And remains the same in stature;  
In the valley, on the mountain,  
With a poor hand or a richer  
You can only fill your pitcher."

Critics have attributed many of the faults of the "Faerie Queene" to the author's admiration of the Italian poets. He brings into his poems the prominent characters of his day, just as Dante wrought into his works the deeds of the men about him. A celebrated painting represents Spenser in an antique room of his Irish castle; an attendant is reading Petrarch aloud, and, sharing his master's enthusiasm, has sprung to his feet and reads with hand uplifted, while Spenser sits spell-bound. Now, in executing original designs, it may be true that Spenser studied models, but to say the later poets have drawn from him would be a narrow assertion. In truth England's latest poet laureate has been accused of modeling after the laureate of Elizabeth's reign. Nowhere in Tennyson can there be found a servile imitation of Spenser, but there is often a something that makes them seem strangely akin—the touch of genius, perhaps, that in common men we call the "touch of nature." Take Tennyson's "Two Voices," and read with Spenser's "Case of Despair;" one poet will seem to echo the other. In many phrases, in the turning of a period, sometimes in the spirit that permeates a whole poem of Tennyson's there will be a resemblance to Spenser—a resemblance you cannot analyze.

Of Spenser's shorter poems we have no time to speak. His "Ruins of Time" was dedicated to the beautiful Mary, Countess of Pembroke, who was Sidney's sister. Others of his poems were "The Tears of The Muses," "Virgil's Gnat," "Mother Hubbard's Tale," "Ruins of Rome," and "Visions." Also a collection of eighty-eight sonnets called *Amoretti*—being Spenser's own love experience in the courtship of his wife, Elizabeth, whom he seems to have adored. "The Epithalamium," inspired by their marriage, is the best known of his minor poems. His description of the bride, as she stands at the altar, is exquisite, beginning thus:

"How the red roses flush up in her cheeks,  
And the pure snow with goodly vermil stayne,  
Like crimson dyde in grayne."

But to go back to the poet's life. Spenser in youth and health was strong in powerful friends; Spenser in middle life had outlived his friends, and the tide of his prosperity began to ebb. First came neglect and insolence from abroad; then domestic troubles. In a fearful insurrection of the people, the old castle was burned to the ground—one of his children perishing in the flames. Reduced to poverty and overcome with grief he returned to England, and, utterly disheartened, awaited death in the spirit of his own words:

"What if some little payne the passage have,  
That make's frail flesh to fear the bitter wave!  
Is not short payne well borne that brings long ease,  
And lays the soule to sleepe in quiet grave?  
Sleepe after toil, port after stormie seas,  
Ease after warre, death after life, doth greatly please."

Spenser waited not long. A sorrowing people soon gathered his body into that "garner of England's greatness," Westminster Abbey; and Spenser found "sleepe after toil—port after stormie seas."

COURAGE consists not in blindly overlooking danger, but in seeing it, and conquering it.—*Richter*.

## OUR BOOK-TABLE.

SOMETHING TO DO. A novel. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1871.

IN this curious, but not unattractive work, we read the lives of two sisters; the one patient, thoughtful, self-devoted and industrious; the other impulsive, poetic, high-spirited, and artistic, but both trained by a refined and intellectual man—their father—and both staunch, noble women. The younger sister marries a seemingly fine fellow, only to discover that he has, long before the marriage, betrayed and deserted an innocent girl, and in her agony quits him and goes upon the stage under a feigned name. After much and varied experience as an actress, discovering that her husband is less guilty than she had supposed she returns to him; mutual forgiveness seems to smooth the way to a happy future, when the repentant husband is killed by a railway accident, and the wife dies of the shock, aided by excitement and over exertion. The elder sister, pursuing the even tenor of her way, has married an honest and "progressive" young physician, and her main agency in the book besides lecturing her sister and making her husband happy, seems to be that of converting to higher impulses a very fascinating, but far from straight-laced ballet-dancer of an impossible pattern, who has been a sort of rival of the dramatic sister. The sorrows of the deserted victim of young Stacy's vacation sentimentality, and the strength of a young physician—an intelligent and high-principled man, married to a commonplace wife—against his passion for a young girl in the neighborhood—piece out the story.

"Something to Do" is a very young book; not precisely in thought and style, though in these there are traces of a certain juvenility and immaturity, but in artistic construction and knowledge of the world. Without setting out precisely to preach any special and exclusive theory, the author has managed to broach, in the conversation or actions of her personages, three or four of the most subtle and profound of social and religious questions: our relation to, and reliance on a protecting Providence—social independence and unconventional adherence to duty—the obligations of uncongenial married people—the status of the woman who, sinning, would yet return—the position of a wife in face of a former and unatoned treachery of her husband towards another woman—and the like thorny matters. To these questions her answers, whether expressly or by implication, are somewhat vague, yet we may infer that, on the whole, they are such as would be dictated by the highest morality and the most refined taste. The glaring fault of the book—the quality of which, for want of a better name, we have called *youthful*—is its lack of artistic relief and subordination, and of dramatic construction. Yet the book has a certain interest; its tone is high and its tendency good; and the author has laid out on it an amount of clear New England hard thinking and honest good will, enough, with better artistic guidance, to make a far better book.

A TERRIBLE TEMPTATION. Part I. By Charles Reade. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1871.

Like all Charles Reade's books this promises to be spirited in dialogue and vivid in description, while it displays all the author's affections both in thought and style. In this number we have no taste of the horrors for which he has been so sternly taken to task by the press; and for this and other good reason, we prefer to postpone comment on the work till its later development.

ALFRED THE GREAT. By Thomas Hughes. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1871.

A hearty, manly book; learned, familiar, and picturesque, all at once. It professes to tell the story of the good old English king, and does it; but with this the author has intermingled an amount of comment on modern English life and politics, in his bluff, downright, yet thoughtful way, which makes the book, as the writer intended it to be, eminently instructive to young people of a reflective turn and to their elders as well.

GINX'S BABY. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1871.

A capital political satire on the evils of English red-tape, or red-tape in general, with plenty of fun to spare on the pragmatical bigotry and jealousy of opposing sects. The book can never have a wide influence in America, clever as it is, since the humor is too inextricably mingled with the minutiae of scene and *dramatis personæ*—the petty details of English poor-law and parochial management—to us nearly as foreign as the domestic affairs of the Kam-schatkadeles.

PIKE COUNTY BALLADS AND OTHER PIECES. By John Hay. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1871.

Were we as tedious as a king we could find it in our heart to bestow it all on the reader, in trying to say all we think of these ballads; but, as in the late great trial, what man, not illiterate or under duress, but has made up his mind in the matter long ago! Suffice it that they are manly, thoughtful, tender, and pervaded by a peculiarly delicate fancy and subtle humor. As an instance of a peculiarly sweet and fanciful bit which the reader might possibly slip over, we delight in quoting the following from "How it Happened:"

"And when you are old and lonely,  
In Memory's magic shine  
You will see on your thin and wasting hands,  
Like gems, these kisses of mine.  
And when you muse at evening  
At the sound of some vanished name,  
The ghost of my kisses shall touch your lips,  
And kindle your heart to flame."

CONDENSED NOVELS BY BRET HARTE. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1871.

Caricature is hardly fair literature and may, in a general way, be excused or condemned as it hits off the glaring absurdities of a bad author or exaggerates the minor faults of a good one. Thus in the present book (which by the way is amazingly clever and sharp in its satire), we laugh heartily over the droll mawkishness of Lothaw, while we are inclined to make rather a wry face over the travesties of Dickens and Reade. But *de gustibus*, etc.: he who pays his money may choose his own victim for scarification; and, after all, a good laugh does no one any great harm.